

Hamlet of Highland

Community Goal:

Maintain the hamlet of Highland as the commercial, institutional and cultural center of the Town.

Objectives:

- Keep civic institutions, expand community services, and promote commercial growth in Highland.
- Beautify the hamlet.
- Improve transportation flow and parking availability.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle accessibility in the hamlet.
- Increase allowable density in certain residential areas adjacent to the hamlet.
- Coordinate use of school and community facilities with targeted community needs.

The hamlet of Highland remains the site of the Town's greatest population and commercial concentration. In the year 2000, approximately 5,060 people or 50 percent of the Town's population lived within the 4.6 square miles that make up the Highland area census tract. Similarly, business activities are concentrated into this relatively small area and, in many cases, share the same structures with two or more residences. Except for the Post Office, which moved from Highland to North Road in 1998, most of the Town's major civic institutions, including the Town Hall, the Highland Public Library, and the elementary and middle schools are located in the hamlet. Lloyd residents have expressed a strong desire to maintain Highland as the commercial, institutional and cultural center of the Town as a preferred alternative to scattered highway development. This chapter of the *Comprehensive Plan* recommends a number of strategies to implement that goal.

It should be noted that, while the Highland Census Tract covers a broad area of Highland (see Figure 2), the hamlet in this chapter is considered to be the area within a ¼ mile radius of the junction of Vineyard Avenue and Main Street at the hamlet's core. Planners consider this to be the ideal distance to

encourage walking for short trips.¹

¹ See *Greenway Connections, Guide B2*.

4.1 CIVIC INSTITUTIONS & COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

To maintain Highland as the community center it is important to maintain civic institutions in the hamlet, such as the Library, Town Hall, and Police Department. These institutions serve as major “anchors” in the hamlet, just as a large department store functions as an “anchor” in a mall. They are the main reasons many residents come to the hamlet, and once there, these residents may stay to shop. Every effort should be made to ensure that these institutions remain in the hamlet. If they outgrow their present accommodations or require more parking, creative solutions should be found to permit these civic anchors to remain in the hamlet’s core.

The hamlet’s vitality also depends on expanding community services and ensuring an active commercial district. To this end, the hamlet’s commercial district should be expanded, and the Town should encourage the location or development of additional community services such as a community center for youth and senior citizens, and day care facilities. The Town should be also proactive in promoting Highland to prospective business owners and entrepreneurs. The *Comprehensive Plan* recommends that the Town identify potential sites for development and redevelopment, and market these sites with a conference similar to the highly successful Economic Development Conference that the Town organized in 2002 to promote commercial development in the Town as a whole.

To ensure that Highland remains the Town’s commercial center, the Zoning should be amended to permit civic uses, professional services and specialized or small-scale retail in the hamlet only, without competition from allowing similar uses in other districts.

4.2 BEAUTIFICATION

The Town has recently completed a number of projects to improve the visual appeal of the hamlet. Trees have been planted along the east side of Vineyard Avenue, and attractive historic lampposts have been installed throughout the central business district. In addition, a number of private property owners have made façade improvements to their buildings. These improvements implement the recommendations of two recent studies undertaken by the Town.

In 1999, the Town’s Economic Development Committee received a \$12,000 grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to conduct a façade design study of storefronts in the hamlet’s main commercial district. The goal of the study was to identify the architectural elements that historically created a

special “sense of place” in Highland and to propose façade redesign to recapture that character and encourage economic development.

Many of the façades in the hamlet’s commercial district date from the 1870s to the 1930s. Over the years, changes to the façades have concealed the structures’ original architecture and gradually created an inconsistent appearance. The façade study recommends that cosmetic changes, such as new windows, durable paint finishes, lighting, and removal of siding that covers the original façades, would restore storefronts to their original turn-of-the-century condition and create a more consistent and inviting shopping environment.

Property owners are under no obligation to make any of the recommended design alterations. However, it is hoped that they will use the study’s recommendations if they plan to upgrade their buildings’ façades. Matching loans of up to \$10,000 with low interest rates are available from the Town of Lloyd Community Development Corporation to help business owners make the façade improvements. One example of the façade design recommendations, with before and after photographs of the improvements made to the façade, are included as Figures 23 to 25 at the end of this chapter.

The Planning Board should consider the recommendations of the façade study in its review of all project proposals in the study area. In many cases, new business owners and/or property owners will be willing to make these improvements as part of the planning process in opening new businesses. The photos showing existing conditions and the recommended façade enhancements should continue to be prominently displayed on the walls of the Town Hall meeting room to facilitate discussion of the façades during Planning Board review. These photos could also be placed in prominent locations throughout the community, such as the Public Library, and in windows of storefronts in the hamlet.

Historic structures greatly contribute to the hamlet’s visual appearance and are an important reminder of the Town’s cultural heritage. Highland was one of the earliest areas to be settled in Lloyd, and it contains numerous sites of historic value. Owners of historic properties should be encouraged to restore these structures.

The Tax Act of 1986 provides incentives for the rehabilitation and restoration of old or historic buildings. These include a 20 percent investment tax credit for the rehabilitation of historic commercial, industrial or income producing residential buildings, and a 10 percent allowance for nonresidential buildings in service before 1936.² To qualify for the historic tax credit, properties must be

² These credits, however, are not available to the normal homeowners who may rehabilitate their homes.

listed on the National Register for Historic Places or be a contributing element in an Historic District. While only one property is currently listed on the National Register in Lloyd, several others are likely to be eligible. Making owners of historic properties aware of the tax credit may encourage them to list their properties and avail themselves of this program.

The Town also has the right to create local historic districts or recognize historic properties. Many structures of historic interest have already been identified by the Town's Beautification Committee (see Figure 8). Lloyd should implement local incentives, such as land use allowances (discussed in Chapter 7.6), to help preserve these unique structures. In addition, the Planning Board's responsibilities should be expanded to include architectural reviews of historic structures. Design guidelines should be developed for Planning Board review of new development and for the renovation of existing commercial buildings.

The visual appearance of Highland has also been enhanced through the efforts of the Town Beautification Committee, a volunteer group whose mission is to make Lloyd appealing to prospective business owners and residents. The Beautification Committee maintains a number of gardens throughout the hamlet, including flowerbeds around the two Highland Hamlet Welcome signs, perennial beds in the municipal parking lots and main shopping district, and barrels of annuals located along Vineyard Avenue. It hangs seasonal decorative flags on the antique-style lampposts in the shopping district, and enhances the lighting installed by the Lions Club with swags of greenery during the winter holiday season. The Committee also plants street trees, and is responsible for maintaining Lloyd's status as a Tree City, U.S.A. Much of the Committee's work is performed through an innovative partnership with the local court justices, who levy community service in lieu of fines for small infractions, such as traffic tickets, and refer violators to the Beautification Committee.

The Beautification Committee recently applied for a Greenway Conservancy Grant to build a gazebo and pergola in the municipal parking lot adjacent to the perennial garden, and is currently designing a September 11 memorial that will include a clock. The Town should continue to support the efforts of the Beautification Committee and should involve these volunteers in developing a comprehensive beautification plan for the hamlet, and in implementing the landscaping proposals in the plan to Make the Hamlet of Highland More Walkable.

Additional recommendations to improve the visual quality of the hamlet include developing improved signage requirements in the Zoning, encouraging the reuse of abandoned and blighted properties, and developing a plan to phase the burial of utility lines in the hamlet area. The Town's

Economic Development Committee could also partner with the Downtown Business Association and hire a downtown manager.

4.3 TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

A major transportation problem in the hamlet is caused by the routing of trucks along Route 44/55, which brings them through the center of Highland. Large tractor trailers have difficulty negotiating the intersection Vineyard Avenue and Milton Avenue on Route 44/55, which creates safety issues for pedestrians, congests traffic while trucks make the turn (often through a number of signal changes), and in a few cases has resulted in property damage to a building fronting the intersection. To avoid these problems, trucks should be diverted from Route 44/55 to Chapel Hill, which has more direct access to the Mid-Hudson Bridge and Route 9W.

To implement this recommendation, Chapel Hill would need to be upgraded and signage should be posted along Route 44/55 directing large vehicles to this road. The Town should encourage the County and the Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council to make these improvements.

The Town owns and maintains three municipal parking lots in the hamlet of Highland. These lots are located adjacent to Village Field, at the intersection of Vineyard Avenue and Milton Avenue, and behind the Town Hall. None of these lots have been landscaped or marked. In addition, there are a number of private lots and parking areas in the hamlet that serve community organizations and churches. On-street parking is allowed on both sides of the street in most areas of the hamlet.

The plan to make Highland more walkable (discussed in the next subsection) includes recommendations to increase parking in the hamlet by expanding the existing lot in proximity to Village Field. These improvements would increase the availability of parking in the hamlet by 117 spaces. The Town Board should implement these recommendations, and should install signs at appropriate locations throughout the hamlet directing drivers to these lots. Local businesses should be encouraged to designate employee parking in the public parking lots to keep parking spaces along the road in close proximity to shops free for customers.

The Highland plan also includes recommendations for landscaping the proposed parking lots with trees, both around the perimeter of the lots and internally. Landscaping parking lots creates a more attractive environment by reducing the impact of a “sea of asphalt” and creating shade for parked cars. These recommendations could be implemented with the assistance of the Town Beautification Committee. Other parking lots in the hamlet should be similarly landscaped. In particular, parking lots that abut sidewalks should be

provided with trees and shrubs located between the sidewalk and the lot. This will reduce the appearance of a “missing tooth” in the streetwall. Gaps in the streetwall discourage pedestrians from continuing further along the sidewalk. By filling these gaps with landscaping, pedestrians will be encouraged to shop the entire length of the street. Existing and proposed parking should also be provided with human scale (no higher than 16 feet) lighting in an architectural style appropriate to the hamlet. Paving and striping these lots will encourage more efficient use.

The sharing of lots by businesses and other establishments with different hours of operation should also be encouraged, and access between lots currently barred by fences and other barriers should be created. Existing and new development should be encouraged to provide off-street parking available to the public. Community Development Block Grant funding could be used to finance part of the effort to improve parking availability in the hamlet. In addition, parking spaces along Main Street and Vineyard Avenue should be delineated with curb markings to ensure more efficient use of these areas for public parking.

4.5 PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE ACCESSIBILITY

Edward T. McMahon, Director of the Conservation Fund, has said that our current road designs “*have made cars happy and people miserable.*” According to the 1997 NYS DOT statistics, 26.3 percent of traffic fatalities in the State are pedestrians. On average, a pedestrian is killed in the US in a traffic accident every 93 minutes. The highest risk group for pedestrian traffic accidents is 8-year old children.

Traffic calming can be used to rectify this situation by slowing automobile traffic and providing a safer environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. Some of the most popular traffic calming techniques are: raising or inverting pedestrian crosswalks; narrowing roads (especially at crosswalks) with extended curbs or flared sidewalks; changing the road surface texture or color at crosswalks; installing highly visible signage and lighting; and using street trees and pedestrian amenities, such as benches, to slow traffic and increase drivers’ awareness of pedestrians. Shorter curb radii, planted medians, speed bumps, and use of in-street posts, bollards or barrels, are further examples of traffic calming techniques.

Traffic calming is already used in the Hudson Valley in places like the Villages of Fishkill, Tivoli, New Paltz, Warwick, Florida, and others. It is also widely used in surrounding states such as Massachusetts and Connecticut, in Europe, Australia and Canada, and is being adopted in a growing number of U.S. towns and cities as well. The theory behind traffic calming is that roads

should be multi-use spaces that encourage social links within the community, rather than merely being access ways for cars. Traffic calming is especially useful in hamlets where greater density per square mile encourages pedestrian activity.

In 1997, the Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council and Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development developed a plan to “Make the Hamlet of Highland More Walkable” (Figure 26). The plan includes recommendations to create a park, walkway system, and additional parking along Twaalfskill Creek at the rear of the Vineyard Avenue commercial buildings, with a footbridge, bandstand and central green. Crosswalk enhancements or installations are recommended for the main intersections in the hamlet and in the vicinity of major activity centers. Traffic calming devices such as these will create a safer environment for pedestrians, which will improve the economy of the hamlet and promote tourism.

The Town has already acted on some of the plan’s recommendations, such as extending the sidewalk at the hamlet’s main intersection at Main Street and Vineyard Avenue to provide better pedestrian visibility and discourage speeding, and planting street trees along the east side of Vineyard Avenue. To implement the remaining recommendations, the Town should take advantage of the funding opportunities for pedestrian and bicyclist enhancements afforded by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). TEA-21, like its predecessor Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), emphasizes the need to incorporate all types of transportation into the planning and programming processes of government. The Town Board should apply for TEA-21 funding to implement the recommendations of the hamlet walkability plan.

In addition, the *Comprehensive Plan* makes the following recommendations to improve pedestrian and bicycle circulation in the hamlet:

- ➔ *Sidewalk Network* The Town should apply for TEA-21 funding for the sidewalk improvements identified by the Town’s Transportation Safety Committee that are listed in Chapter 6. Additional funding should be allocated in the Town’s Capital Improvements Plan on an annual basis for a five-year period.
- ➔ *New Sidewalks* The Planning Board should require sidewalks in areas of concentrated residential development and in proximity to educational facilities and other major activity centers. All commercial developments requiring Planning Board approval in the hamlet should install and/or repair sidewalks with concrete, bluestone or masonry paving material. The Town should also consider installing a sidewalk

along North Road to provide a pedestrian connection between the hamlet and the new Post Office.

- *Pedestrian Amenities* Benches and other pedestrian amenities should be placed on sidewalks throughout the hamlet. Benches should be placed to face the sidewalk.
- *Signage* “Yield to Pedestrians” signs along with bollards in the center of the road should be placed at all major intersections in the hamlet.
- *Bicycle Racks* The Town Board should provide bicycle racks at all municipal buildings and public facilities in the hamlet. The Planning Board should also consider the appropriateness of bicycle racks in their review of site plans.

4.6 INCREASE DENSITY

Compact development is more economical to serve with public infrastructure, such as roads, water and sewer, which results in lower property taxes and lower costs to consumers. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 3, compact development coupled with density reductions in agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas of the Town, preserves open space and maintains rural character. The hamlet of Highland is currently served by public water and sewer and is the traditional location of intensive development in the Town. Permitting increased density in the hamlet will result in economic benefits to taxpayers, and will help to preserve the Town’s natural environment and rural character.

Chapter 5 of the *Comprehensive Plan* recommends adopting incentive zoning and implementing a transfer of development rights program to preserve agricultural land. Incentive zoning encourages developers to provide community benefits in exchange for increased density. Transferring development rights limits development in one area of the Town where there is an important resource, such as active farmland, and transfers those rights to another area where greater density is desired. The *Comprehensive Plan* recommends that the Town Board amend the Zoning to permit increased density in the hamlet for applicants who avail themselves of incentive zoning or who transfer development rights from other areas of the Town.

The growth and increased density contemplated for the hamlet should also reflect the “traditional neighborhood development” styles characteristic of downtown areas. Traditional neighborhoods feature a mix of uses (including residential, commercial, civic and open space uses), a pedestrian scale, and a diversity of housing styles, types and sizes to accommodate households of all

ages and incomes. The *Comprehensive Plan* recommends that the Town adopt a Traditional Neighborhood Overlay (TN-O) District, accompanied by illustrated design standards, for areas of the hamlet served by public water and sewer, and adjacent areas where such mixed-use development is feasible and would contribute to beneficial growth. The design standards should include requirements for a system of narrow, interconnected streets with sidewalks and street trees to encourage alternative modes of transportation.

The purpose of the TN-O District would be to encourage the development of fully integrated, mixed-use pedestrian oriented neighborhoods designed to minimize traffic congestion, suburban sprawl, and infrastructure costs. The TN-O District would maintain the traditional scale, density and character in new infill development in the downtown, and would extend that traditional neighborhood character to adjacent areas. By expanding the downtown area, the TN-O would enhance the function of the hamlet as the focus of commercial and civic activity in the Town, and would provide an alternative to modern use-segregated developments such as large lot suburban subdivisions and strip commercial developments. The overlay district would also allow for the creation of receiving zones for development rights transferred from the Town's agricultural lands. A number of communities in the region have adopted TND zoning provisions that could serve as a model for Lloyd to expand the downtown hamlet area.

4.7 USE OF SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The Town of Lloyd does not currently have a community or youth center. Community groups such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and similar organizations currently meet in the local churches or schools. Large Town meetings and public hearings are also held in these facilities, as well as in the Highland Fire Station. While the Town's Comprehensive Recreation Plan identifies a need for a community center, it is unlikely that such a facility will be constructed or established in Lloyd in the foreseeable future. The Town is fortunate that the schools, churches and Fire Station have been willing to provide space in their facilities for community use. The Town should continue to coordinate use of these community facilities for community groups and meetings.

The Town recently approved funding to establish the presence of a law enforcement officer in the schools. The purpose of the program, which began in September 2002, is to encourage good conduct and prevent drug use and violence. The program's effectiveness should be monitored, and funding should be approved in the future if it is successful.